

Brule River State Forest

Master Plan Progress Report



PUBLIC WORKSHOP

Saturday, October 19, 2002

8:30 AM to Noon

Northwestern Middle School

Highway 2 Poplar, WI

In early August, the Brule River State Forest (BRSF) Master Plan and EIS Draft document was distributed for review and comment to over 1,100 participants on the BRSF mailing list. Additional mailings were sent to elected officials, jurisdictional governing bodies / public agencies, the Governor's Office, representatives of Tribal Governments, and other interested parties. As a result of several requests, The Department of Natural Resources has agreed to extend the official Comment Period from 45-days to the maximum of 90-days (ending November 4, 2002). The WDNR has also agreed to hold an additional public Workshop to allow for further discussion and input on a number of topics in the BRSF Master Plan and EIS Draft where public comments remain varied. Postcards and public notices were sent out to inform participants about the additional Public Workshop for the Draft Master Plan and EIS. The Workshop was publicly noticed in accordance with WDNR policy.

By the end of September, approximately 145 comments had been received in various forms. These forms include comments received at the Public Hearings held in Brule on September 10th and in Fitchburg on September 12th, as well as, submitted written and verbal comments. The length and complexity of topics discussed in the BRSF

Master Plan and EIS Draft requires time and commitment to review the document. The public reviewers' involvement in this review process is greatly appreciated by the DNR staff.

The topics selected for additional discussion at the October 19th Workshop were chosen based on the public comments received through the end of September. The topics were chosen because public opinions remain divided in these areas. In a few cases, comments seem to be based on misunderstandings of proposed management actions in the BRSF Master Plan and EIS Draft.

The purpose of the workshop is to focus discussion on six main topics. The workshop will provide the opportunity for the WDNR to clarify any confusion pertaining to the BRSF Master Plan and EIS Draft and to assure that the WDNR has a full understanding of the concerns and desires of public participants.

This progress report summarizes the six (6) topics that will be the focus of the October 19th Workshop.

During the Workshop, public comments will be recorded. Those not able to attend the Workshop may submit comments in writing. All of the comments will be evaluated, and taken into equal consideration by the WDNR master planning team in refining the BRSF Master Plan and EIS. Anyone may submit additional comments by the close of the Comment Period on November 4, 2002.

No final decisions will be made until after the close of the Comment Period (November 4, 2002) and the WDNR master planning team has an opportunity to review and evaluate the whole of the comments

received. A Summary of the Public Comments received on the Draft Master Plan and EIS and any substantial changes will be sent to our participants on the mailing list and given to the Natural Resources Board for their consideration prior to rendering a decision on the Master Plan's approval in December.

People who are unable to attend the workshop are invited to submit comments on these or other topics of the Draft Master Plan and EIS **no later than November 4, 2002, to:**

Mr. Steve Petersen
Brule River State Forest
Forest Superintendent
Brule River State Forest
6250 S. Ranger Rd.
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The BRSF Master Plan Revision and EIS may be viewed on the DNR Internet web site:

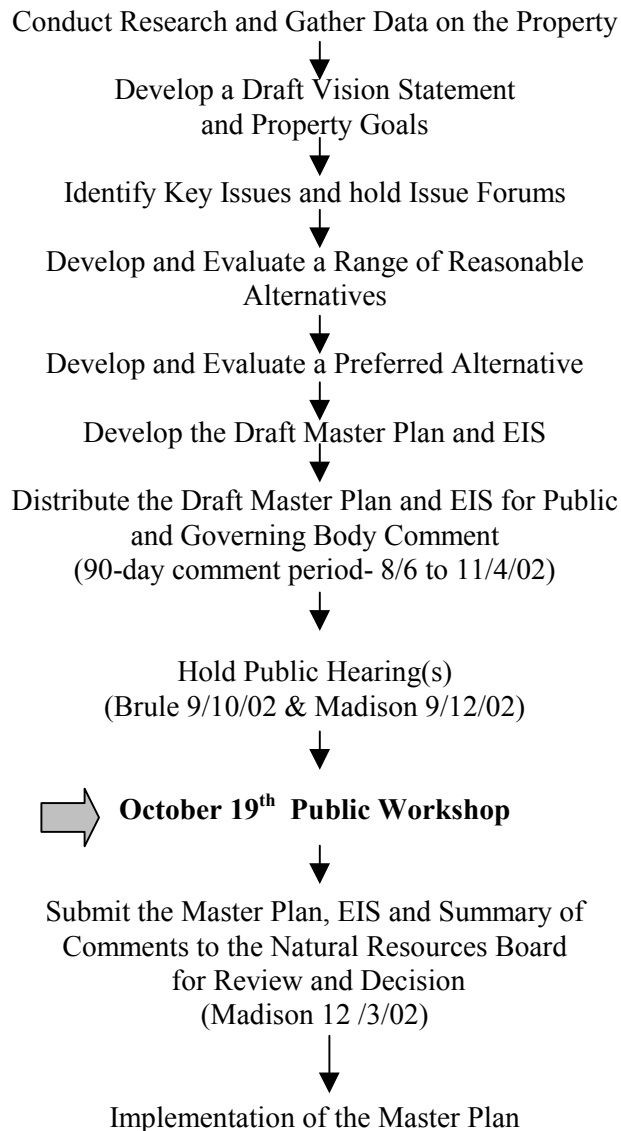
www.dnr.state.wi.us/master_planning/Brule/index.htm

Additional copies of the Master Plan Revision and EIS may be requested by contacting:

Master Plan Program Assistant: (715) 365-8993 or
E-mail: robert.dall@dnr.state.wi.us

As before, we ask that comments focus on the management of the property proposed in Chapter Two and the accuracy and adequacy of the Environmental Impact Statement contained in Chapters Three and Four. Please print your name and address along with your comments. If you are an elected official or represent an organization, public agency, or governing body, please indicate your title / office / agency or organization if applicable, and your return address. If your comments are intended to represent your organization as a whole, and they have been voted on and endorsed, please describe the process of endorsement and the parties who endorsed them. Otherwise the comments submitted will be considered the comments of the individuals whose signatures appear on the letter.

THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS



***Thank you for your
continued involvement
with the BRSF Master Plan!***



BRULE RIVER STATE FOREST MASTER PLAN

TOPICS OF INTEREST OR CONCERN



1. Boundary Expansion

Pages 32-34* (*Page numbers correspond to pages in the Brule Master Plan and EIS Draft)

Plan Summary:

- Expand the forest project boundary to authorize the purchase of primarily undeveloped land if present landowners seek to sell land.
- Three (3) different boundary expansion areas are proposed; North 17,000 ac, West 1,000 ac and South 26,000 ac.
- Expansions are proposed to meet the unique opportunities on the Brule River State Forest to restore a functional clay plain boreal forest, pine barrens and protect water resources.
- Expansions would provide opportunities to maintain existing levels of hunting opportunities and snowmobile trail connections.

Public Comments/Concerns from August and September 2002:

- Support boundary expansion to protect the Brule River and other streams.
- Support boundary expansion to restore boreal forest and barrens.
- Oppose the expansion for fear of negative tax impact on local governments.
- Oppose expansion because it would limit development in the area.

Clarifications/Additional Information:

- The Department cannot purchase land, as it becomes available unless the land is within an authorized project boundary.
- The Department would not seek to own all of the land within these proposed expansion areas. This would leave some land for development and expansion of local communities.

Boundary Expansion Clarifications/Additional Information (continued):

- The Department is interested in undeveloped land within these boundaries, not lands that currently have homes or business buildings.
- The state of Wisconsin makes payments to local governments in lieu of taxes. In addition, public ownership reduces the demand on services from the local government.
- Much of the land in these areas is currently owned by timber industry and recent trends around the state indicate the possibility of land sales by these companies.
- Restoration of functional boreal forest and pine barrens ecosystems cannot be achieved without larger tracts of land.
- Maintenance of large blocks of undeveloped land help protect the water quality of the Brule River and area streams.



2. Protection of Water and Fishery Resources

(Pages 25-26, 49-63, 84-90 and Appendices B, C, D, E and G)

Plan Summary:

- Maintain and enhance the high water quality and natural flow of the Brule River.
- Maintenance of diverse natural communities is designed to protect the excellent water quality and popular fishery of the Bois Brule River and tributaries.
- All management will continue to exceed the minimum standards of the Best Management Practices for water quality by not crossing streams during land management, by increasing the distance of management from streams/ivers and by avoiding increased runoff.
- Periodic water quality monitoring will be conducted to assure that the high water quality of the Brule River and tributaries is not impacted by the management activities of the Brule River State Forest.
- River Management Areas 4 and 5 provide a corridor with an emphasis on maintaining the natural beauty and scenic values of the Brule River through protection of existing forest cover covering over 9,000 ac with an average width of over 3,000 feet.
- Management practices to improve/maintain the fish habitat in the Brule River system will continue.

Public Comments/Concerns from August and September 2002:

- Some fear that timber harvest and community restoration actions will degrade the water quality of the Brule River and tributaries.
- Some are confident that the river and water resource protection measures in the plan will continue to protect the water quality and fishery.
- Concern that the increasing level of use (anglers and paddlers) on the river will degrade water quality and fish habitat.

Clarifications/Additional Information:

- The Brule River has an extensive history of water quality data including chemical and physical aspects of water, fisheries and aquatic invertebrates which indicate that the Brule River has excellent water quality (Appendix D). This excellent water quality has been maintained for decades under state forest management that has included timber harvest, tree planting, prescribed burning, ski trails, snowmobile trails, canoeing access and angling.
- Peaks in spring melt runoff have the greatest potential to impact water quality, particularly on the clay soils. Research data indicates that a watershed with different aged forest stands and some open areas results in snow melting at different rates which reduces the peak runoff (Appendix B).
- The greatest land use threat to the Brule River and tributaries within the watershed is from private residential development and local government road work not state forest timber harvest (Appendix C).
- Several proposed management actions are beyond the direct slope to the Brule River. For instance, the proposed ski trail and parking lot is located several ridges beyond the slope into the Brule River and will not have any impact on water quality.
- There is no documentation to suggest that rivers user have caused habitat damage. The increased use and inappropriate behavior of some users has impacted the remote and natural setting on the river.



3. Aesthetic and Scenic Resources

(Pages 29, 52-61, 80-81, 99-104)

Plan Summary:

- Provide an environment that emphasizes natural beauty and enhances a sense of solitude and quietness.
- About 5,000 ac are designated as scenic management areas, recognizing the important unique natural beauty and remote experience values associated primarily with water based recreation on the Brule River and Lake Minnesuing. In addition to these management areas, the special scenic values of the Brule area's character and setting are a priority for an additional 6,600 ac of Native Community and Recreation Management Areas.

Aesthetic and Scenic Resources Plan Summary (continued):

- In addition to 11,600 ac of the forest with aesthetics as a primary goal, aesthetic values are considered in all management actions on the state forest.
- Recreational developments will be planned to blend into the surrounding landscape and reflect the historic architectural character of the CCC era.
- Scenic vistas are proposed at Waino rock and along the snowmobile trail overlooking the Brule Bog to increase appreciation for the beauty of the area.
- Existing red pine plantations will be thinned with the goal of a more naturally appearing forest.
- Overall the plan will increase the area of conifers and older trees which are aesthetic resources desired by some people.
- The plan proposes small clearcuts on the clay plain (2-10 ac) in order to allow growth and planting of white spruce and white pine to replace the aspen dominance.

Public Comments/Concerns from August and September 2002:

- Support of the designated scenic management areas.
- Concern that the scenic management areas will increase old dead trees and increase blowdown, disease and fire hazard.
- Concern that any management action (timber harvest, restoration planting, trail development etc.) will degrade the aesthetic characters that some people value.
- Concern that the scenic characteristics of the Brule River State Forest will be degraded if new or additional people come to the area to recreate.

Clarifications/Additional Information:

- Managing for aesthetic considerations is very difficult because each person holds a different perspective on what is aesthetically pleasing or scenic. The Department has heard a wide variety of opinions on this topic.
- The primary focus of scenic resources with the forest is along the river. No timber harvest activities will be seen from the river and management of public use facilities will be to assure safety and consistency with the scenic character of the river.
- A primary goal of the plan is to "Maintain and restore native ecological communities and habitats." This cannot be accomplished without management actions that may not be aesthetically pleasing in the short term (2-5 years).
- Aesthetic considerations are incorporated into the planning of all management actions. All planned management actions are presented at a local annual meeting in Brule to dialogue with affected parties.



4. Restoration and Forest Management

(See plans and maps for each management area)

Plan Summary:

- The Lake Superior Clay Plain Ecological Landscape is primarily north of Highway 2, representing 15,300 ac or about 1/3 of the forest. On this landscape, 13,000 ac or 85% of the clay plain “would experience a management approach to increase the dominance of boreal conifers and increase the age of the forest overall” (Page 91, EIS). The remaining acreage would be managed for early successional forest.
- To achieve the restoration goals on the clay plain, a variety of methods will be used including 2-3 small harvests (<10 ac) per year, planting of white pine and white spruce, and burning or ground disturbance to encourage growth of white birch.
- Of the 15,300 ac mentioned about, about 4,000 ac of the clay plain will be passively managed as scenic or ecological reference areas.
- The clay plain management areas will also maintain several large grasslands (800 ac) and the existing constructed wetlands.
- The Mille Lacs Uplands and Bayfield Sand Plain are the sand soil areas south of Hwy 2 which represent about 2/3 of the forest. The goals and management intensity across this part of the property ranges from primarily passive management for scenic values in Area 13 to very active management to restore pine barrens in part of Area 10.
- Area 5 includes the Brule Bog and the southern stretch of the Brule River. The only harvesting in this area will be to thin the existing pine plantations to the level of a naturally appearing forest.
- Areas 6 and 12 will be managed with occasional small harvests (2-15 ac) with the goal of increasing the dominance of older northern hardwood and red/white pine.
- Areas 8 and 9 will be actively managed for primarily a dry pine forest of jack, red and white pines with some aspen and scrub oak areas.
- Area 10 will be actively managed to produce a more open area of 600 ac barrens habitat as well as a rotating mosaic of dry pine forest types.

Public Comments/Concerns from August and September 2002:

- Oppose active management on the Brule River State Forest. Just let the trees grow as old as they can get.
- Support active management to reach the restoration and management goals of the plan. It will also reduce the problems of disease and forest fires.
- The plan should not decrease the area of aspen or other early successional habitats because they are important to some wildlife and hunting recreation.
- The restoration and management goals of the forest will also provide forest products.

Restoration and Forest Management Public Comments/Concerns (continued):

- No areas of this forest should be managed for open or pine barrens habitat, only old trees.
- Not enough of the forest is being managed for an open pine barrens habitat because it is a rare habitat and supports species such as sharp-tailed grouse.

Clarifications/Additional Information:

- The 2-10 ac harvests on the clay plain are designed to decrease aspen and allow planting or better growth of balsam fir, white spruce and white pine. While aspen cover will decline slowly over the next 50-100 years, it was part of a natural boreal forest and will remain in the landscape.
- Some form of disturbance (timber harvest, prescribed burning etc.) is necessary to increase white birch on the clay plain. This was an important species in the presettlement forest of this area.
- Restoration plans on the clay plain involve a variety of techniques including area of no active management. The various techniques will be monitoring and management adapted to best meet the restoration goals.
- If additional lands are purchased on the clay plain they will be managed similar to the boreal forest restoration goals of Area 1. If additional lands are purchased on the sand plain they will be managed similar to the restoration goals of Area 10.
- Pine barrens is a globally rare community but restoration assessments identified a 600 ac core area with a shifting mosaic as the best opportunity given the present acreage and staffing levels. If additional lands were acquired in the southern expansion area then this management could be expanded.



5. Management of River Users

(Pages 25, 54-57, 107)

Plan Summary:

- Provide and accommodate a range of land and water based recreational opportunities while protecting the natural beauty and quiet experiences.
- Increase education and law enforcement on the river to reduce user conflicts and improve behavior.

Public Comments/Concerns from August and September 2002:

- The Brule River is a unique and important resource to both canoeists and kayakers.
- The Brule River and tributaries are a unique and important resource to anglers
- Private landowners along the river are sometimes disturbed by the behavior of people recreating on the river.
- Some support better access and facilities on the river. Others fear this will bring more people.

Management of River Users Public Comments/Concerns (continued):

- Some would like to see the numbers of people on the river reduced because of problems with crowding, inappropriate behavior and conflicts among users and landowners.
- Use of the river by recreationists is important to several local businesses.

Clarifications/Additional Information:

- The Department recognizes that the landowners, paddlers and fisherman all value the natural beauty and resources of the Brule River but sometimes their use of the river bring these groups into conflict. The recreational facility changes and increased staff resources on the river are planned to minimize these conflicts.
- The Department has and will continue to work with local landowners to reduce problems resulting from recreational use of the Brule River.
- The state forest does not currently have statutory authority to regulate the number of people using the river.
- The intent of the plan is to focus on changing or controlling the behaviors of the recreationists to reduce the problem raised during public comment.
- Increased law enforcement, education and better distribution of users on the rivers are planned to improve the river recreational experience.



6. Recreational Improvements

(Pages 25, 42, 46, 55, 56, 63, 65-67, 71, 72, 76)

Plan Summary:

- Reduce river crowding by spreading out paddlers with a new landing at FF.
- Maintain 18 angler access parking lots. Work to reduce erosion from access.
- Reduce inappropriate behavior and health problems by providing pit toilets and drinking water wells at several canoe landings.
- As many as five campsites could be removed from the Copper Range campground because of spacing needs.
- A group campground would be added north of Bois Brule Campground (4 sites, up to 20 people at each) to reduce conflicts with groups camping in the family campground.
- A new picnic area would be constructed at Brackett's corner.
- Expand the Afterhours ski trail by building an additional loop and 2 footbridges over the Brule River that would connect the existing trail with the forest headquarters.

Recreational Improvements Plan Summary (continued):

- Construct a new 20-25 mile network of cross-county ski trails in Area 8 off of Samples Road. The increasing popularity of cross-country skiing in this area indicates a need for a 200 car parking lot, warming shelter and toilets to support this new trail. Mountain bikes may also use this in the summer.

Public Comments/Concerns from August and September 2002:

- Some opposed and some favored a new landing at FF.
- Some opposed and some supported drinking water and toilets at more canoe landings.
- Support the separate group camping site.
- Oppose any new recreational facilities fearing that they would bring more people to the area.
- Support new ski trail in Area 8.
- Oppose a new ski trail and parking lot in Area 8.

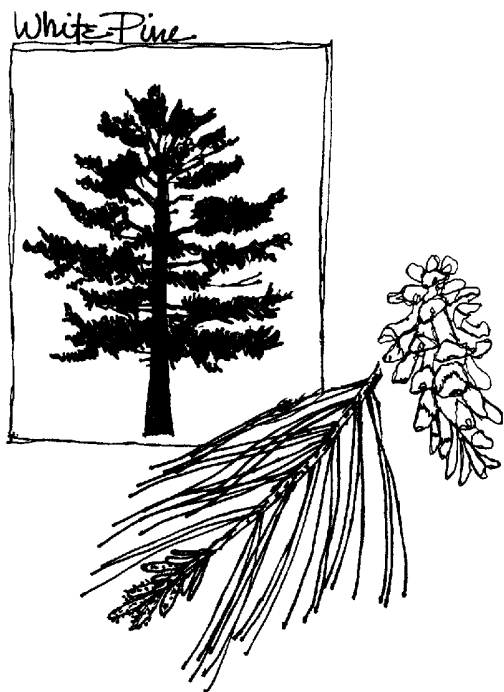
Clarifications/Additional Information:

- The addition of the FF land is designed to reduce crowding and improve health and safety of the users.
- Our information suggests that use of the Brule area will increase with or without the improvements. The improvements are designed to manage this increase in use while reducing conflicts and environmental damage.
- Additional toilets and drinking water are designed to reduce health problems and the frequency that paddlers trespass on private land while on the river.



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